# MASONIC TEACHINGS AND MODERN PROBLEMS

**By BRO. HERBERT HUNGERFORD**

*Help to Make These Pages a Real Forum for Discussion*

*All brothers interested in any phase of Masonic Education, especially those who believe in fostering the Masonic Study Club movement, are invited to send criticism, comments and, particularly, practical suggestions for furthering this movement. Those who are willing to help organize Round Table Discussion Groups or other Masonic Study Clubs in their Lodges or their districts are invited to send for Membership Blanks, etc., which will be supplied free of cost.*

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BEAR in mind the warning given with the first announcement of our Seven Keypoint Introductory Programs arranged for Round Table Discussion Groups in which we emphasized the fact that we were simply offering tentative suggestions which might be modified any way through the experience or advice offered by well-informed brethren. Thus far, but few suggestions have been received but one of them seems to be quite pertinent and suggestive of immediate action. Bro. Ernst W. Gruss, of Houston, Texas, in a very able and illuminating letter advises a change in the arrangement and names of the courses, thus:

1. Masonic Symbolism.
2. Masonic Symbolism Applied.
3. Ancient Landmarks and Teachings of Masonry.
4. History of Masonry. a Abroad b North America c. United States d. Home State; e. Home County, City, and Town

With the exception of item e, the student can get his history by just reading a good work on the subject. By "History" I suppose you mean the past of the organization as we now have it and those organizations we claim to be the forerunners of our organizations.

Now, I hold a somewhat different idea of the history of Masonry. Briefly it amounts to this: Since the hour or day when man felt the desire to improve himself both mentally, intellectually, spiritually, and physically, he was engaged in Masonic Work. Thus Masonry, according to my opinion, is synonymous with Civilization. On this basis, all those beings who have done aught for the betterment of mankind have been Masons regardless of whether not they were members of any organization. And again, all lose ancient organizations, whose object of their labors was the betterment of mankind, were Builders in the truest sense of the word, hence masons, though not called so. I do not accept the old trade guilds as the forerunners of Masonry. Just think that I should consider organizations of beer-guzzlers, rum fiends, and gluttons my Masonic ancestors, men who destroyed, but did not build the human mind, when I can follow the leadership of all those great master

> minds who sought to improve mankind since the beginning of human improvement. I consider it puerile to emphasize the rather far- fetched theory that the trade guilds were our Masonic ancestors. To me it shows that our Masonic Students are themselves not clear just what Masonry really is. My Masonry is a direct descendant of those ancient leaders who, tens of thousands of years ago, sought to raise their fellowmen to higher level of life. Nor do we have to borrow the symbols of the bricklayers and stonemasons for our own use. The fundamental symbols of Masonry are ages-old and date back to the time when man first began to think. This is incontrovertibly proven by the findings of archaeologists and anthropologists. No, the equilateral triangle, the square, the circle, the cross, the apron, the East, the West, the South, and others were established tens of thousands of years before guilds of bricklayers and stonemasons were thought of.

It seems to me that the points raised in this letter are well taken and, mainly, deserving of our emulation. While I do not altogether agree with the viewpoint expressed by Bro. Gruss, I can fully appreciate his point that it will be far more interesting to the newly-made Mason if we start with lessons more definitely supplementing the points that we have tried to impress in the ceremonials of our different degrees.

I am quite willing, in fact, to concede that Masonic history should be made the last, rather than the first, of our introductory round table discussions.

I am inclined, however, to believe that our first course of study in discussion groups, composed chiefly newly-made masons, should be on "The Fundamental Teachings of the Fraternity."

The causes which have brought about this conclusion on my part have been not only my personal observation of the activity of Study Club Groups but, particularly, the reaction or response to my series of articles on "Our Ancient Fraternity and Present Day Problems" which have been running during the past year in the columns of THE BUILDER. It seems to me that the considerable interest manifested by our brethren everywhere in this series of critical articles indicates that there is a definite value in tieing-up or comparing the problems of modern life with the teachings of our ancient Fraternity.

It seems to me, likewise, that this particular plan of beginning Masonic Study discussions with a brief course on "Masonic Teachings and Modern Problems" is right along the line and fully in harmony with the plan of our ritual.

It is presumed that every candidate applies for admission to a lodge because he hopes thereby to learn how to improve himself in Freemasonry. In other words, it seems to me that it is a natural and justifiable expectation of every newly-made Mason that he will find in the Fraternity practical assistance in solving his personal or life-problems. If the objective of Fraternity is not precisely this, I confess that I have failed to understand what it is.

It is absurd for any one to assume that the sole objective of Fraternity is self-improvement for its members, yet, I doubt if any one will deny that this is one of its foremost aims. This being the case, it seems a common sense proposition that each Study Club group for newly-made brethren should first be concerned with discussing the principles and practices of fraternity which ought to help every member of any lodge to live more happily, and a more serviceable and, therefore, a more successful life.

# A Challenge to Inside Critics of Freemasonry

YOUR attitude in accepting or rejecting this challenge should determine whether you are a sincere, constructive critic of your Fraternity, or merely an ordinary fault-finder. My claim to the privilege of presenting the challenge is derived from the fact that my recent series of articles in THE BUILDER, on "Our Ancient Fraternity and Present Day Problems," brought me considerable commendation as well as some rebukes for being, as one writer puts it, "a bold and plain-spoken critic of our ancient and honorable institution."

I make no denial of the fact that I have endeavored to criticize our Fraternity fearlessly, but I do insist that I have always been, likewise, a friendly critic. Whenever I have pointed out what I considered an unwise or unwholesome tendency, or a serious shortcoming in the programs and activities of present-day Masonry, I have endeavored invariably to suggest changes or recommend remedies, which, I believe, would correct the conditions of which I have complained.

I object most vigorously to any implication that every critic of our Fraternity must be regarded as a "calamity howler." The Fraternity certainly is a human institution and the weakness and frailty of all mortal beings is a clearly recognized factor of our ritual. So, the ostrich-minded objectors to any criticism of our Fraternity do not disturb me in the least.

On the other hand, it is a matter of serious concern when we find so many members who do not hesitate to criticize the Craft, but appear to be unwilling or at least inactive either in putting forth any effort of their own or participating in a constructive program for changing and improving the conditions which are the cause of their complaints.

The challenge I issue, therefore, is that every critic who sincerely believes that some of the activities we emphasize in our lodge programs today are not the best and most desirable features to be put foremost; also that some of the tendencies and trends of modern Masonry do not seem to be in the right direction, is not acting in accord with the true Masonic spirit when he merely gives voice to his objections, yet fails to do his part to bring about the changes necessary to correct the conditions which he believes should be modified.

According to my observation in our lodges today, we have too many fault-finders and too few constructive critics. In nearly every lodge you will find members who are regarded more or less as "pests" because they are always raising objections, finding fault and scolding about this, that or the other activity of the lodge; yet these fault-finders seldom can be induced to assume the leadership of any activity or even take part in any program that is designed to correct the conditions which they complain about.

I admit that this is a perfectly natural human trait, nevertheless, it is not in accord with the high ideals of Freemasonry. A person who professes to be a good man and a Mason should always be willing to back up his words with his deeds.

In my own criticisms of modern Masonic activities and tendencies, I have pointed out why I believe that the average lodge today has made a mistake by shifting too much emphasis upon the purely social and entertaining features of its program with a corresponding decrease in the emphasis upon the

educational features of Freemasonry. As result of this shifting of our emphasis, it is my contention that the present tendencies are away from the ancient fundamental ideals of the Fraternity and that modern Masonry is in danger of a decline because it is failing to impress upon every newly-made brother the true teachings of the Institution. This is due mainly to the fact that the distracting social, commercial and recreational activities of everyday life have so influenced Masonic programs that we push our candidates through the "degree mills" so rapidly that we fail fully to impress upon their minds the important educational and moral lessons upon which our great Fraternity has been established.

In my series of articles criticizing these modern Masonic tendencies, I believe that I presented ample evidence to justify every criticism. I have since received considerable testimony from brethren from all parts of the country whose observations and opinions fully bore out my contentions.

Likewise, I maintain that I have not rested content with merely pointing out some of the faults and mistaken efforts in modern Masonry, but I have sincerely endeavored to devise a constructive program that will provide the things that I believe are needed to supply these shortcomings to which I have called attention.

In other words, I regard the activities to supplement every lodge program with some sort of definite Masonic study as being, by all means, the best possible way to remedy the defects brought about by the overemphasis upon speed with its consequent superficiality.

I was gratified by the numerous letters of comment which my series of critical articles provoked; but I confess that I have been somewhat disappointed at the response to my appeal for cooperation in helping to devise and develop popular programs for the extension of the Masonic Study Club campaign and the introduction of some form of Masonic education into every lodge possible.

If you agree with the writer's contention that some of the activities of modern Masonry have gotten off the main track, you certainly owe it to yourself, as well as to your brethren, to do your part in helping to switch your lodge programs back to the right track.

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